

What is Claimed is:

1. A surgical instrument for inserting an implant for treating female prolapse, the surgical instrument comprising:

a handle;

5 a needle portion having a straight portion emerging from the handle and a generally helical portion having a distal end region,

wherein the needle portion is sized and shaped so that the distal end region may initially be moved through a patient's obturator foramen toward the region of the patient's ischial spine, and then toward a vaginal incision in the region of the vaginal apex,  
10 so that an implant may be received by the distal end of the needle and moved from the vaginal incision through the patient's obturator foramen.

2. A surgical instrument according to claim 1 wherein the generally helical portion comprises a left handed helical portion.

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3. A surgical instrument according to claim 1 wherein the generally helical portion comprises a right handed helical portion.

4. A surgical instrument according to claim 1 wherein the needle portion has a generally  
20 circular cross section with a diameter of less than about 5.5 mm and more than about 0.5 mm.

5. A surgical instrument according to claim 1 wherein the straight portion of the instrument has a longitudinal axis and the helical portion has a length, measured along the longitudinal axis of the straight portion, of more than 2 inches and less than twelve inches.
6. A surgical instrument according to claim 1 wherein the helical portion has a width of more than about 1 inch and less than about nine inches.
7. A surgical instrument according to claim 6 wherein the helical portion has a pitch of at least 2 inches and a radius of at least 0.5 inches.
8. A surgical instrument according to claim 1 wherein the straight portion of the instrument has a longitudinal axis and the helical portion has an axis that is not parallel to the axis of the straight portion.
9. A surgical instrument according to claim 8 wherein the axis of the straight portion and the axis of the helical portion form an angle of about 8 degrees.
10. A surgical instrument according to claim 8 wherein the distal end portion of the instrument points away from the handle and at an acute angle relative to a plane that is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the straight portion of the instrument.
11. An assembly of surgical instruments for treating female prolapse, the assembly comprising:
- a first surgical instrument comprising a handle; a needle portion having a straight portion emerging from the handle and a generally right handed helical portion having a distal end region, wherein the needle portion is sized and shaped so that the distal end region may initially be moved through a patient's obturator foramen toward the region of the patient's ischial spine, and then toward a vaginal incision in the region of the vaginal apex;
- a second surgical instrument comprising a handle; a needle portion having a straight portion emerging from the handle and a generally left handed helical portion

having a distal end region, wherein the needle portion is sized and shaped so that the distal end region may initially be moved through a patient's obturator foramen toward the region of the patient's ischial spine, and then toward a vaginal incision in the region of the vaginal apex; and

5                   an implant for treating the prolapse.

12. An assembly of surgical instruments according to claim 11 further including a pair of dilating connectors and insertion sleeves surrounding the implant.

10       13. A surgical procedure for correcting human vaginal prolapse comprising:

                  providing a first surgical instrument comprising a handle; a needle portion having a straight portion emerging from the handle and a generally right handed helical portion having a distal end region; a second surgical instrument comprising a handle; a needle portion having a straight portion emerging from the handle and a generally left  
15       handed helical portion having a distal end region;

                  creating a vaginal incision;

                  incising the patient's skin in the region of the patient's obturator foramen on a first side of the patient,

                  passing the distal end portion of the first surgical instrument through the  
20       obturator foramen and then through the vaginal incision;

                  associating the implant with the first surgical instrument;

                  incising the patient's skin in the region of the patient's obturator foramen on a second side of the patient,

passing the distal end portion of the second surgical instrument through the obturator foramen and then through the vaginal incision;

associating the implant with the second surgical instrument;

5 moving the distal end portion of the first surgical instrument from the vaginal incision through the patient's obturator foramen with an end of the implant associated with the distal end portion;

moving the distal end portion of the second surgical instrument from the vaginal incision through the patient's obturator foramen with an end of the implant associated with the distal end portion; and

10 attaching the implant to the vagina.

14. A method according to claim 13 wherein the step of creating a vaginal incision includes the step of creating a vaginal incision in a region of the apex of the vagina.

15 15. A method according to claim 13 wherein the step of passing the distal end portion of the first surgical instrument through the obturator foramen and then through the vaginal incision includes the step of passing the distal end of the instrument through the inferior part of the obturator membrane in the region of the obturator foramen above the ischio-pubic ramus.

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